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ABSTRACT

Second language (L2) instructional texts often lack genuineness. Rather than instances of real language use, these texts are adaptations or simplifications of genuine texts or texts created with the intention of illustrating selected features of the L2 system. The purpose of simplification, adaptation, exemplification, and control is to facilitate the L2 learner's task. However, often these manipulations change the nature of the text so that peculiar qualities uncharacteristic of natural language use are shown. Perhaps more serious are abnormalities in the reading process caused by non-genuine reading materials and certain inappropriate instructional procedures. L2 learners need to develop the ability to authenticate texts, which can be accomplished only if the reader approaches the text in a way corresponding to normal communication and reads it for any of the reasons one normally reads for. L2 learners will fail to authenticate texts if they read only for reasons imposed by instruction. The task of L2 readers can and should be facilitated in ways that do not interfere with the ability to authenticate text. A brief list of references is included. (Author/MSE)

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Abstract

L2 instructional texts often lack genuineness. Rather than instances of real language use, they are adaptations or simplifications of genuine texts or texts created with the intention of exhibiting selected features of the L2 system. The purpose of simplification, adaptation, exemplification and control is to facilitate the task of the L2 learner. But often, these manipulations change the nature of the text so that peculiar qualities uncharacteristic of natural language use are exhibited. Perhaps more serious than such textual peculiarities are abnormalities in the reading process caused by non-genuine reading materials and certain instructional procedures which are somehow inappropriate. L2 learners need to develop the ability to authenticate texts. A text is authenticated by a reader only if the reader approaches it in a way which corresponds to normal communication, if s/he considers the text as normal language use and reads it for any of the reasons one normally reads for. L2 learners will fail to authenticate texts if they are exposed only to non-genuine texts and if they read only for instruction-imposed reasons. The task of L2 readers can and should be facilitated in ways which do not interfere with developing the ability to authenticate text.

The L2 Text: Genuineness and Authenticity

Today, language teachers are told that instructional materials must be genuine or authentic. Several questions arise in relation to this. What do these terms mean? Are they synonymous? Why must the texts we use be genuine and/or authentic? Can any of the problems we encounter in our classes be traced back to a lack of genuineness and/or authenticity in our L2 texts? And if so, what can we do about it? These are the questions that this paper will attempt to answer.

A genuine text is a true instance of language use. It is something that people read in the real world, the world outside the classroom. Genuineness is unconditional; a text either is or is not an actual sample of real language use. Reprints or excerpts of published materials--journalistic, academic, scientific or literary writing, for example--are genuine; materials which have been changed in some way or written in order to exhibit certain aspects of the L2 system are not. The quality of genuineness is sometimes referred to as authenticity. However, we shall, following Widdowson (1978), differentiate these terms. Genuineness, we have seen, is a property of text. Authenticity, on the other hand, results from the manner in which a person approaches and deals with

text. A text is authenticated by a reader only if the reader approaches it and deals with it in a way which corresponds to normal communicative language use and reads it for any of the reasons one normally reads for.

We shall return to the authenticity of L2 texts later. But now let us consider the matter of genuineness in L2 te4xts in more detail.

Many texts used in L2 instruction today lack genuineness. Rather than instances of real language use, they are genuine texts which have been changed or manifpulated in some way--simplified versions or adaptations of genuine text--or texts which have been created with the intention of exemplifying selected parts of the L2 system. Such texts are commonly used because it is felt that genuine texts are too difficult.

The process of simplifying a text involves replacing elements in the original, genuine text which are considered to be overly difficult with others which are assumed to be less difficult, resulting in a simplified version of the original text (or at least a version which is assumed to be simpler than the original). The selection of lexical items and syntactic structures to be included in a simplified version is usually based either on what students at a specified level (e.g., low intermediate) are assumed to know or on word lists and lists of structures. Simplified versions are often prepared by professional materials developers and publishers for a

wide audience of learners.

Adaptation of genuine texts is usually carried out by teachers for specific groups of learners. The goal is to achieve what Madsen and Bowen (1978) call congruence--a match among any of the variables related to instruction: students, materials, objectives, methodology and so on. For example, if a teacher decides that a text is written at too low a level of technicality for the students, s/he may re-write it at a higher level; the result in this case is a text which is harder, not easier to read. A text may be adapted by substituting one element for another, by omitting elements, by adding such elements as the L1, redundancy or context clues, by manipulating the typography of the text, or by embellishing it with such materials as notes or questions, glossaries, illustrations or other visual aids, audiotapes, and others.

When teachers set out to create instructional texts, they often use only vocabulary items and/or grammatical structures which the students have already studied and may incorporate those which come next in the syllabus. Such materials are created, then to exemplify specific features of the L2 and are called exemplifications.

Simplification, adaptation and exemplification are carried out in order to facilitate the task of the learner. But in many cases, these processes change the nature of text so that peculiar qualities are exhibited, qualities which are not

characteristic of natural language use. The peculiarities can be identified at each of the levels of text structure: lexical, syntactic, semantic, pragmatic and rhetorical. At each level, I shall describe just one peculiarity and point out how it complicates rather than facilitates the task of the learner.

The vocabulary items used in simplified versions are often taken from word lists. The words found in word lists are the most frequently used and, often, the most polysemous in English--that is, they are likely to have several different meanings. Thus it may be more difficult for a learner to assign meaning to such words, and the chances that an inappropriate meaning will be assigned are greater than with less polysemous words.

When syntax is controlled or simplified, embedded structures in complex sentences and complex nominalizations are usually eliminated through a process of detransformation, resulting in a series of short, simple sentences. There is evidence, however, that some embeddings help rather than hinder comprehension (Nilagupta, 1977) and that short, simple sentences are harder to comprehend than complex sentences containing clues to underlying relations (Blau, 1982). Moreover, there is mounting evidence (O'Donnell, 1976; P. Johnson, 1981) that the function of syntactic cues in texts is to support or clarify meaning; as long as the semantic content of a text is

interpretable, there is no need for the learner to fall back on syntactic cues.

Manipulation may change the semantic structure of a genuine text by adding redundancy. The addition of such elements as repetitions, paraphrases, definitions, transitions, context clues and other types of explicit information is intended to facilitate the understanding of separate points in the text. But adding redundancy makes the text longer and this may dilute the informational density of the text, making it more difficult for the L2 learner, who often tends to lose the thread of what s/he is reading, to get the gist of the text as a whole.

As for pragmatic structure, an exemplification, written in order to exemplify some element or elements of the L2, constitutes, in Widdowson's (1978) terms, text but not discourse because there is a lack of normal communicative purpose and/or content. Such a passage displays language as usage but does not represent any normal, communicative use of language. The rules and conventions which govern the communicative use of language may be ignored or violated. Texts which do not adhere to the conventions of language use contradict the expectations of learners and so are probably harder to process than texts which follow the rules.

Simplification or adaptation can change the rhetorical nature of the original text. For example, edited texts and

extracts may lack the introductory material which helps a reader to predict what is to follow and access relevant background knowledge and/or schemata. And when the modals, qualifiers, intensifiers and so on which signal hedging, coloring and strength of claim are removed, the learner may have difficulty in understanding these important features of the presentation of academic or technical information. When the rhetorical nature of discourse is distorted, the task of rhetorical processing is made more difficult.

We have seen just a few of the problems which the lack of genuineness in L2 texts can cause for a learner. This suggests that it would be better to use genuine texts. The great advantage of using genuine texts is that they are truly representative of the target discourse and prepare learners to comprehend material from the target discourse. The use of genuine texts permits the identification of the properties and structure of texts of a certain type. And genuine materials are more likely to be approached and dealt with by learners in a way which corresponds to normal communicative activity and thereby be authenticated. But the basic problem remains--genuine texts are often too difficult for our students. Before we consider possible solutions to this dilemma, let us turn to the matter of authenticity.

It is important to remember that genuineness does not ensure authenticity. Authenticity is not a quality of text;

rather, it results from use, the way in which texts are used by teachers and students. It is a normal part of language processing to authenticate text and so the L2 texts learners deal with should be authenticated by them to the extent that this is possible in instructional circumstances.

An L2 text may fail to be authenticated by a learner for any of of a number of reasons. Here are several.

First, it lacks genuineness. Any of the peculiarities of text which result from the processes of adaptation, simplification, control or exemplification interfere with a learner's ability to deal with the text as an instance of normal language use.

Second, although the text is genuine, it has the appearance of a language learning exercise. A case in point is the genuine text accompanied by a glossary.

Third, the reason for processing the text is not determined by the learner. In the real world, people listen or read for their own reasons. But in the classroom, reasons for listening or reading are often imposed on the learner by the teacher or by instructions on a tape or in a book.

Fourth, it offers no opportunity for learning. A text written at a lower or the same level as the learner's present level of competence offers no opportunity to enrich his or her linguistic repertoire. And a text whose content is already known to the learner offers no opportunity to broaden his

or her horizons.

Fifth, it is not something the learner would chose to listen to or read if s/he had a choice. People do not normally listen to or read material whose content is childish, trivial, simplistic, uninteresting or irrelevant. Unfortunately, much of the content of L2 texts is perceived in this way by learners.

Sixth, the learner has no choice insofar as how to process the text. In the real world, different texts are read in different ways in acccordance with one's aim--what one wants or needs from a text. Only too often, all L2 texts are processed in the same way, for full comprehension. As a result, learners may fail to authenticate texts which are not normally read for full comprehension.

Seventh, the learner does not respond to the text in a normal way. Response, both cognitive and affective, is an integral part of text processing. When learners are consistently exposed to texts followed by a series of quesitons which check their comprehension of the informational content of the texts, they may form the habit of suppressing personal response to text.

In each of these cases, the L2 learner fails to authenticate text because s/he does not approach, process, or respond to text as people do in non-instructional settings.

Why is it important that learners authenticate the L2 texts they are exposed to? The answer is that unless they

do, they may not be able to approach and deal with other texts in ways which correspond to normal communicative activity, the way people do in the real world, in the future. Teachers of extensive reading often complain that their students are incapable of global reading, of reading for general comprehension. They read every text in the same way--intensively, looking up every unfamiliar word, insisting on understanding everything in the text. In other words, they approach each text as a language-learning exercise, not as an instance of real language use, thereby failing to authenticate the text.

Many students read literary texts in the same intensive way. Their concern is with <u>what</u> is said when it should be with <u>how</u> it is said, with recognition of the elements of style and relation of style to content. They do not approach literary texts as they are meant to be approached--as a search for personal meaning and response. In a word, they do not authenticate the texts.

It may well be that the inability to authenticate text is the result of the use of inappropriate materials and inappropriate instructional practices.

If genuine materials are too difficult for our learners and if learners will fail to learn to authenticate texts if they are exposed only to texts which lack genuineness, what can we do?

activity. This gives them a realistic direction and purpose for reading.

Third, individualization: It is generally thought that tailoring instruction to the individual will facilitate learning. Task assignment allows for a certain degree of individualization if tasks are varied in accordance with individual students' needs, abilities, preferences and concerns. Other ways to individualize are to provide a variety of texts on different topics or several texts on the same topic but at varying levels of informational or linguistic complexity, and/or tasks or exercises at different levels of difficulty and permit learners to select the ones they want to work with.

Fourth, sequencing: Instructional texts can be sequenced in such a way that learning will be facilitated. Structural grading has been most commonly used. But with the decline of the structural syllabus, other possibilities need to be investigated. One of these is graded approximation to a genuine text. This can be accomplished in several ways. Over 20 years ago, Robbins Burling (1968) proposed that the first texts learners encounter be translations of L2 passages, written in the L1 but following the word order of the L2. In subsequent versions, L2 words are inserted systematically so that the text turns progressively into the L2. More recently, Okada (1977) has suggested that one or more simplified versions of a genuine text be presented before the genuine one.

Fifth, recycling: Another generally agreed-upon facilitative principle is that content should be re-introduced a number of times for optimal learning. Krashen (1981) states the case for "narrow reading," i.e., reading on one topic as opposed to reading on a variety of topics: the recycling of content leads to a familiarity which learners can build on in future reading. The benefits of both sequencing and recycling would result from the presentation of a series of thematically related texts in each unit of instruction which are sequenced in a difficulty progression, from easy to more difficult informational content.

Sixth, simple accounts: Widdowson proposes the use of what he calls simple accounts. He describes the simple account as an instance of the simplification of language use as opposed to the simplification of language usage that is the simplified version. While a simplified version is "an alternative textualization of a given discourse," a simple account is "a different discourse altogether. It is the recasting of information abstracted from some source in order to suit a particular kind of reader. . . . It is a genuine instance of discourse, designed to meet a communicative purpose" (1978, p. 89). Widdowson suggests that a series of simple accounts which increase in both linguistic and informational complexity be developed

and presented to learners to facilitate text processing with none of the disadvantages of using manipulated materials.

A final, and the most simple, way to facilitate the task of the learner without compromising genuineness and authenticity is to allow students to select their own real-world reading materials and to read them for their own purposes. Interest is probably the single most important determinant of readability, and when learners can read what they are interested in and for the reasons which interest them, they will have less need of facilitation.

Ultimately, L2 learners must learn to comprehend a variety of genuine L2 texts independently and efficiently, in the ways in which and for the reasons for which one reads in the real world. This goal entails several other abilities: to set one's own purposes, to adjust processing strategies appropriately, to take what is wanted or needed from a text and ignore the rest, to apply appropriate problem-solving strategies when difficulty is encountered, and to self-monitor the outcome during processing. They will learn all of this only by authenticating genuine texts. If such facilitative techniques as those just mentioned were adopted and if instructional practices were modified to allow for the use of L2 texts in ways which correspond to the normal communicative use of language, then L2 texts need lack neither genuineness nor authenticity, and better learning should result.

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